

## TALL FESCUE

### *Lolium arundinaceum*

(Schreb.) S.J. Darbyshire  
 plant symbol = LOAR10

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



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### Alternate Names

*Festuca arundinacea* Schreb.

### Uses

Tall fescue has been over-used in the past, prior to the understanding of its endophyte status and implications. For decades KY-31 tall fescue was planted widely as a forage and erosion control plant because it is widely adapted and easy to establish and long lived under harsh conditions and mistreatment. It is now recognized that the presence of the endophyte (in this grass and others) contributed to both the tough nature of the grass and the poor performance of grazing animals in the warmer months. It is suspected that this endophyte infected cultivar has been deleterious to wildlife as well. For these reasons, there are efforts by some groups to ban the use of tall fescue in some states, and it still may be overused.

Now there are many cultivars of this species, some of which are produced without endophyte contamination of the seed for forage production use. Fine leafed cultivars are intended as turf grasses, and often are intentionally endophyte infected to capitalize on the competitive advantage that the endophyte confers to

the plant. Testing services are available to have existing stands of this grass evaluated for endophyte presence. Infected tall fescue is used best as pasture or hay when it is stockpiled for feeding only after fall frosts and freezes have occurred.

The old standby KY-31 (with endophyte) is a very good critical area treatment grass due to its tolerance of poor soils and abuse or neglect. However, the user should be sure this grass will meet all the planting objectives and that there are not good alternative species before specifying its use.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at [plants.usda.gov](http://plants.usda.gov).

### Description

Tall fescue is a robust long-lived, comparatively deep rooted, bunchgrass. The leaves of forage types are broad, while turf types have been selected for narrow leaves. The flat leaves are smooth and shiny on the underside, with pronounced ribs on the upper surface. The stems are 3-4 feet tall, supporting a nodding panicle that is 4-12 inches long. There are 227,000 seeds per pound.

### Adaptation and Distribution

Tall fescue is adapted to cool and humid climates and most soils with a pH of 5.5 to 7.0. Tall fescue will grow fairly well on soils low in fertility, but it is better adapted to fertile conditions. Tall fescue will produce top growth when soils are as cold as 40 degrees F, and it continues growth into late fall in the south.

Tall fescue is distributed throughout the majority of the United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

**Establishment**

Tall fescue is easy to establish due to its rapid germination and good seedling vigor. It may be planted by any common method such as grass seeders, hydroseeding, and broadcasting. Seeding rates for turf are very high in order to obtain a dense, even turf-usually 50-100 pounds per acre. In mixtures with other seed for critical area treatment work, the tall fescue component is typically 10-15 pounds per acre.

**Management**

While tall fescue is tolerant of abuse and low fertility, it does respond to fertilizer inputs. Follow the soil test recommendations for turf and forage uses. The management considerations for forage use of endophyte infected stands are discussed under **Uses**.

**Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

Several cultivars are recommended in the Northeast for turf; consult university extension publications for the latest ratings. For cool season grass critical area uses, KY-31 is difficult to beat, but there are often other alternatives to this species which will have better wildlife benefit.

**Prepared By & Species Coordinator:**

*USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program*

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS <<http://plants.usda.gov>> and Plant Materials Program Web sites <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>.

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